

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 31, 2021

9:02 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Roger Holland, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Shelley Hughes  
Senator Peter Micciche  
Senator Tom Begich

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 111

"An Act relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to public schools; relating to early education programs; relating to funding for early education programs; relating to school age eligibility; relating to reports by the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to reports by school districts; relating to certification and competency of teachers; relating to assessing reading deficiencies and providing reading intervention services to public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; relating to textbooks and materials for reading intervention services; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to school operating funds; relating to a virtual education consortium; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 111

SHORT TITLE: EARLY EDUCATION; READING INTERVENTION

SPONSOR(s): EDUCATION

03/24/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/24/21	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/26/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/26/21	(S)	Heard & Held
03/26/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/29/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/29/21	(S)	Heard & Held
03/29/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/31/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

**WITNESS REGISTER**

DEENA BISHOP, Ph.D., Superintendent  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 111.

KYMYONA BURK, Ed.D., Policy Director for Early Education  
ExcelinEd  
Tallahassee, Florida

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified about early education policy.

KATHERINE ELLSWORTH, Ph.D., Executive Director  
Federal Programs, Mat-Su Borough School District  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 111.

BOB GRIFFIN, Senior Education Research Fellow  
Alaska Policy Forum  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented Top 10 Myths and Misconceptions Surrounding Alaska's K-12 Reading Crisis.

MARK LACKEY, Executive Director  
CCS Early Learning  
Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified about SB 111 and Head Start funding.

ED KING, Staff  
Senator Roger Holland  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for SB 111 on behalf of the sponsor.

## **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[9:02:59 AM](#)

**CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, Begich, Hughes and Chair Holland. Senator Micciche arrived shortly thereafter.

### **SB 111-EARLY EDUCATION; READING INTERVENTION**

[9:03:31 AM](#)

**CHAIR HOLLAND** announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 111 "An Act relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to public schools; relating to early education programs; relating to funding for early education programs; relating to school age eligibility; relating to reports by the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to reports by school districts; relating to certification and competency of teachers; relating to assessing reading deficiencies and providing reading intervention services to public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; relating to textbooks and materials for reading intervention services; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to school operating funds; relating to a virtual education consortium; and providing for an effective date."

**CHAIR HOLLAND** said the meeting would begin with invited testimony and then continue the sectional analysis. He called on invited testimony.

[9:03:59 AM](#)

**DEENA BISHOP**, Ph.D., Superintendent, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, said that every child in Alaska deserves the fundamental right to learn to read. SB 111 is the most important piece of legislation in her 31-career as this legislation holds school districts across the state accountable to the great mission that every Alaskan student reads well by third grade. Her testimony will focus on the reading components of the bill. People want to make a lasting impact on student learning in the state of Alaska. A reading bill is critical. With this bill, school districts, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), are empowered to set a clear focus to guide implementation. This is the real work of reading improvement. High-quality, evidence-based reading

instruction matters to all students to be strong readers by third grade. Clear legislation is necessary to provide explicit and systematic instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension strategies. It should happen in every primary classroom. The reading wars are over. Phonics and phonemic awareness are essential to reading.

DR. BISHOP said that early literacy screening tools administered three times a year are critical for identifying students with potential reading difficulties and monitoring towards proficiency. That is key in the bill. She would suggest revisiting legislation throughout the bill's existence with updated reports to check on implementation fidelity and learning success in Alaska's school districts. She believes that if the state is doing this, it will see a difference.

DR. BISHOP said that she appreciates the preschool funding continuing in this bill. For many Alaskan children, early interventions in reading skills will support the outcome of reading by third grade. Evidence-based reading interventions are key. This would support having a plan for intervening with those students not quite reaching proficiency every year. This will keep their parents informed and keep them as partners in the work. It may avoid any type of retention. Interventions do matter.

DR. BISHOP said that statewide teacher training on the science of reading is essential. This is not generally taught in preservice programs at universities. This provision will drive high-quality training for educators and support them in this work. Teaching all children to read is hard work and supporting teachers in schools is essential.

DR. BISHOP said that she supports DEED having the authority to guide high-quality reading instruction. The book *Shadows on the Koyukuk* by Sydney Huntington shows the importance of reading for all. Sydney Huntington, an Alaska Native, attended a Bureau of Indian Affairs school prior to statehood. He only went to third grade. However, in his book he states that the greatest gift he was ever given in his school was the gift of a teacher teaching him to read. When he could read, the world opened up to him. He is one of Alaska's great elders. When he learned to read, life changed for him. Just like Sydney Huntington, every Alaskan child deserves the right to read by third grade.

[9:09:26 AM](#)

KYMYONA BURK, Ed.D., Policy Director for Early Education, ExcelinEd, Tallahassee, Florida, said that now more than ever is the time to establish policies that support students, especially in a time of significant learning loss because of the pandemic. Strong policies like the committee is considering today lay the groundwork for equipping parents, students, and teachers with the proper tools and resources necessary to ensure Alaskan students are reading at grade level by the time they enter fourth grades. She is a former state literacy director for the Mississippi Department of Education and led the implementation of the Literacy-Based Promotion Act. Mississippi focused its attention on strong, early literacy policies and has had significant results in a short amount of time. It was a comprehensive approach and state-led effort. Mississippi focused on a few things that are in SB 111. Mississippi is supporting teachers through professional development in the science of reading, allowing literacy coaches and reading specialists to provide onsite dedicated support to improving and changing literacy instruction and adopting high-quality instructional material aligned to the science of reading.

DR. BURK said that for students, Mississippi is assessing where students are with universal screeners to ensure that teachers are able to provide the instruction needed to fill the gaps and address reading challenges and deficiencies and also create individual reading plans. Teachers are able to indicate and track the strategies they have used and to determine whether those strategies are working and if they are not, to change course and implement new strategies and interventions. Lastly, Mississippi wants to equip parents and families with the resources to support student learning at home and to let them know that this is a partnership. Parents are needed to make sure the student's journey at school is successful. In the last decade, Mississippi has adopted these policies to support this work, including the first-ever investment in pre-K with early learning collaboratives and its Literacy-Based Promotion Act. Mississippi's preservice candidates who want to be licensed in early elementary education must pass an assessment on the science of reading.

DR. BURK said that early literacy is also an economic issue. Data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation show that students are less likely to drop out of high school if they have a strong foundation in reading and are more likely to go on to college and secure a successful career path. As the legislators consider SB 111, they should consider how to change the lives of students, parents, and teachers for the better and how to ensure

that students are set up for success early and have a strong foundation to improve the economic health of the state and the quality of life for students.

CHAIR HOLLAND noted that Alabama passed a program in 2019 and instituted it in 2020. He asked if it is similar to this legislation.

DR. BURK responded that the Alabama literacy initiative includes dyslexia. Mississippi has a separate law for dyslexia. Alabama's bill is one of the most comprehensive literacy bills to date. Tennessee just passed theirs. All these components that the committee is considering today are in the bills from Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee.

[9:14:34 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES observed that Dr. Burk's presentation talked about what Mississippi did for students, teachers, and parents and that SB 111 has some pieces to engage parents in K through third grade. She asked Ms. Burk if she can name any specific things about the components for parents.

DR. BURK replied that part of Mississippi's law provided parents with read-at-home plans. Those include strategies in each of the components of reading that parents can do at home for free. South Carolina enacted Mississippi's read-at-home plans. In Mississippi, parents are part of the individual reading plans. Parents can't assist if they don't know, so they are notified immediately of screener results and told their child may have a reading deficiency. Parents are part of the process. The Early Learning Collaborative Act provides training for districts to train parents. There are parent guides about standards for math and reading, grades K-8.

SENATOR BEGICH said that this bill terminates early learning after a few years with a sunset clause. He asked for her thoughts on that.

DR. BURK replied that she cannot lobby on things, but yesterday Mississippi doubled down on its commitment to early childhood by providing more funding and expanding the number of seats available to four-year-olds. Pre-K and that quality early childhood experience is extremely important to ensuring that children are ready and on that trajectory to be successful by the end of third grade.

CHAIR HOLLAND said that Senator Begich brings up a good point. He asked Dr. Bishop for any thoughts on the sunset for the pre-K portion of SB 111.

DR. BISHOP responded that although she likes to never have to worry about funding, she is confident that the state will show evidence for the state investment in pre-K. She does not fear it because she believes in what they can do if everyone is aligned with a cogent program. The state will see success in children and it will bring additional investment very similar to what Dr. Burk just shared.

CHAIR HOLLAND said his idea with the sunset is that the bill is changing the foundation formula and increasing the education budget. Ten years is a great period of time to look at this. The committee could decide if more time is needed. He fully anticipates that some future legislature will revisit this and fix it long before the sunset happens, but it does need fiscal sideboards to ensure good use of education funds.

SENATOR BEGICH said his issue is about consistency and the message sent to parents. It has been indicated that the reason for the sunset clause is because the state is experimenting with pre-K, so the state needs to see evidence. He asked if she feels the pre-K experience in the Anchorage School District for the last decade has been experimental or if it has shown results, because she has testified that Anchorage's early education program has had results.

DR. BISHOP responded that there is solid evidence that the Anchorage School District has taken its own operational monies and expanded 16 additional pre-K classrooms. Pre-K is essential and it works. She is not trying to be contrary; she believes in evidence-based reading instruction and early intervention, as early as for three- and four-year-olds. The state can make this happen ubiquitously across the state. It is not a pilot and Anchorage invests its own operational funds to educate four-year-olds.

CHAIR HOLLAND responded that he does not doubt that the Anchorage School District is making early education and pre-K work. His concern is that the execution in the field of the plan determines whether pre-K works as SB 111 puts forward.

SENATOR BEGICH asked Dr. Bishop to respond to changing the age of entry from September 1 to June 1.

DR. BISHOP answered that she hasn't looked at the evidence or research around age, but her experience is that she had more success as an elementary principal when the entry date was later rather than earlier.

SENATOR BEGICH said that the bill in about four years takes the "should" clause for retention to a "must" clause for retention. That has been referred to as hard retention. He asked for her position on hard retention and its efficacy on ensuring that students graduate from the Anchorage School District. He noted that neither the school-age clause or retention clause has sunset dates, only early education and intensive reading intervention do.

DR. BISHOP replied that initially when the bill was being drafted a couple years ago, she spoke to superintendents and school leaders in those southern states that have this legislation. She spent the most time in Florida with Dr. Barbara Jenkins, who is in Orlando with over 250,000 students. The evidence-base on retention is not solid. However, interventions are key. Florida has hard retention. Dr. Jenkins said that educators do not like to retain students unless it benefits them, which means that something different is done. What was meaningful was preschool, getting early literacy right. Teachers do everything they can so they do not retain students. While it was out there as a consequence, Florida did not see mass retentions. The prediction was that everyone not reading at grade level would be retained. That did not happen. Kids were not retained yet reading instruction was increased. The evidence on retention is that just keeping a child in the same seat does not improve student learning. The key is in the interventions that change things. As an educator who knows the will and work of educators in the Anchorage School District, they will rally around students and with parents to enable the learning to happen. For English language learners and students with learning disabilities, provisional waivers work when retention is not appropriate. She does not have fear with this. She has gained that knowledge from experts who are in states with hard reading retention. They don't retain kids because they are increasing the learning and proficiency of students.

SENATOR HUGHES said she appreciates Dr. Bishop's response. A lot of people are looking at research that showed that retention created problems, but that research was not based on schools that had read-by-nine programs and schools that had intensive interventions. She is glad that Dr. Bishop took the time out to reach out to superintendents across the U.S. She is renaming it



a strong promotion policy. The effective date is out five years. It will not going into effect until a student has had a chance to have all those interventions. Some of the states put in a promotion policy right away. This bill would delay it. She doesn't think there will be an uptick [in students retained]. She believes that there will be an uptick in students being successful and teachers having a sense of reward for moving students to the next grade level who are truly prepared.

9:31:13 AM

KATHERINE ELLSWORTH, Ph.D., Executive Director, Federal Programs, Mat-Su Borough School District, Palmer, Alaska, said that she is appreciative of SB 111 and its focus on reading and early literacy. The Mat-Su Borough School District has looked at studies of those who have attended a Mat-Su preschool vs. those who did not. Students take the Kindergarten Developmental Profile when they enter school in the fall. Those who attended Mat-Su preschools outscored their peers who did not in all 13 areas of the Kindergarten Profile, most notably, in print awareness and knowledge of letters and symbols followed by classifying and sorting objects, phonological awareness, and number recognition. Mat-Su knows that the preschools are getting the results it wants, which is preparing students to enter kindergarten with a strong skill set.

DR. ELLSWORTH observed that SB 111 indicates that it will be culturally responsive to local communities and accessible, regardless of socioeconomic status, which is key for early education programs. Mat-Su supports Parents as Teachers for early literacy. Mat-Su has one currently called Read to Me Now to promote reading with students before they come to school.

DR. ELLSWORTH said the mantra of the Mat-Su Superintendent Randi Trani is everyone should want for all kids what they want for their own kids, and this bill exemplifies that. Mat-Su wants all kids in the state to read on grade level by grade three. This bill has a clear pathway for teachers to be qualified in the areas they are teaching, whether as a reading teacher or in an early education program. It provides multiple pathways for teachers to develop their skills.

DR. ELLSWORTH said that the Mat-Su Borough supports curricula for students that is evidence-based and incorporates the five areas of reading. For almost a decade Mat-Su has been working to building its RTI (Response to Instruction) or MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support), so it knows that reading assessment tools and progress monitoring are key to providing interventions and

tracking student progress. It is a best practice that should be done statewide for all students. For those who are struggling, providing reading opportunities for students outside of the school day is key. Providing meaningful, timely progress reports to parents and keeping them involved is so key. She said she is glad to see that written into the bill.

DR. ELLSWORTH stated that the virtual consortium has been a long time coming. Alaska needs that to get quality education to all students no matter where they live. Regarding the cut-off date for students to turn five for kindergarten, she spent eight years teaching kindergarten. She could tell in the first few days of school who had July and August birthdays. They may be academically ready but often struggle socially. If the date is moved to June 1, then she would expect preschool to be available to all students. Being older for kindergarten has a lot of advantages.

DR. ELLSWORTH suggested that a decision about retention at third grade be made by a team, like an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team does for special education students, and the final decision for retention would rest with a superintendent or the superintendent designee. The final decision about retention should rest with someone trained in education.

DR. ELLSWORTH mentioned page 27, line 23, that talks about a policy for grade level progression and said she would like more guidance with that, such as would that be expanded at district discretion. Overall, Mat-Su strongly supports the bill. All kids in Alaska deserve to be able to read well and read well by third grade. This bill ensures that.

SENATOR BEGICH noted that pages 7 and 17 are about Parents as Teachers and that the only language relating to culturally responsive is in pre-K policies. Both of those are terminated at certain time in this bill. He has suggested maintaining the standards for pre-K in the bill. He asked if she were aware those are not retained at the present time.

DR. ELLSWORTH responded that like Dr. Bishop, she feels that once the state sees the benefits of preschool and how that affects student achievement, the state will want to continue funding that.

SENATOR BEGICH said that brings him to the issue of what works and what doesn't work. He asked whether she would agree that Mat-Su has evidence that its high-quality, voluntary early

education programming works. She had mentioned the date change. The places used as evidence for changing the age eligibility have been Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Australia, which all have strong early education components. He asked her if early education is supported by evidence in the Mat-Su School District or is it experimental at this point.

DR. ELLSWORTH answered that it is not experimental. Mat-Su has been explicit and purposeful about implementing pre-K programs. Mat-Su reviewed and adopted curricula and all preschool teachers were trained on the implementation of the program. Mat-Su uses assessment tools in the spring and fall to measure progress. One of the beauties of this bill is that it is explicit about support and having evidence-based programs. That is key to excellent learning.

SENATOR BEGICH thanked her for her response.

9:42:40 AM

BOB GRIFFIN, Senior Education Research Fellow, Alaska Policy Forum, Anchorage, Alaska, presented Top 10 Myths and Misconceptions Surrounding Alaska's K-12 Reading Crisis. He said that a lot of his comments would be similar to what he provided last year, but there are a few new committee members. He is a big fan of this legislation. People have been working on this for many years and hopefully can push it across the finish line this time. The state needs reading legislation for many different reasons. One is the state's dismal outcomes, but it should be effective legislation. He has recognized these top 10 myths since he has been working on this legislation since 2014.

MR. GRIFFIN presented Myth 1: All research indicates students should ALWAYS be socially promoted, even if they are far below expected proficiency in reading in 3rd grade. He showed a list of 15 studies supporting the effectiveness of performance-based promotion.

MR. GRIFFIN presented Myth 2: We don't need a minimum reading standard for 3rd grade promotion because urban students in Alaska have reading scores that are above average. (Implying that rural schools are responsible for dragging our scores down dramatically). The state PEAKS results show it is not an urban/rural thing at all.

MR. GRIFFIN presented Myth 3: Poverty is the key contributor to Alaska scoring dead last in the NAEP US 4th grade reading for

low-income and upper/middle-income students. The state is dead last in NAEP, but Alaska is one of the lowest-poverty states.

MR. GRIFFIN presented Myth 4: Ethnic minorities are primarily responsible for our low NAEP scores and white Alaskan students score above average. He called this narrative offensive.

MR. GRIFFIN presented Myth 5: Alaska's unusually high ethnic and linguistic diversity greatly contribute to reading test scores far below average. A 2015 study by a University of Alaska Anchorage professor said that Anchorage was one of the most diverse cities, but a 2021 collaborative investigation came to a different conclusion, Anchorage was 126th in ethnic diversity and 182nd in linguistic diversity.

MR. GRIFFIN Myth 6: We don't have to worry about our 4th grade NAEP reading scores because Alaska has above average growth in NAEP reading scores between 4th and 8th grade. Alaska does have above average growth in NAEP reading scores between 4th and 8th grade, but Alaska is still doing poorly in math and reading in grade 8.

MR. GRIFFIN presented Myth 7: High quality Pre-K improves NAEP scores more than comprehensive reading policies.

MR. GRIFFIN presented Myth 8: States that use the Florida performance-based promotion 3rd grade reading model saw their test scores increase in 4th grade reading but didn't improve 8th grade scores or math scores. Early childhood literacy improvements helped Florida in every category.

MR. GRIFFIN presented Myth 9: With a comprehensive reading policy that socially promotes very weak readers, Alaska's kids can still achieve NAEP scores near the US average in a few years. States that used performance-based promotion, or hard retention, did better than states with comprehensive reading programs that do not use performance-based promotion policies.

MR. GRIFFIN presented Myth 10 Source NEA Rankings and Estimates: Florida and Mississippi dramatically increased their per-student spending to add universal Pre-K and a comprehensive reading policy. Florida and Mississippi increased their spending just slightly above the national average.

MR. GRIFFIN presented his Conclusion: Kids who haven't learned to read, can't read to learn and face dismal prospects in life. Despite favorable demographics and funding compared to other

states, Alaska has slipped to the very bottom of NAEP reading scores across the spectrum of race and economic status. Alaska's kids are just as bright, our education professionals are just as dedicated and our parents love their kids just as much as anywhere else. Alaska's kids can't afford another year of inaction on a comprehensive reading policy to address our childhood literacy crisis.

CHAIR HOLLAND said that was like drinking from a fire hose. He appreciates the information and will go over this in the future.

9:53:28 AM

SENATOR BEGICH observed that Mr. Griffin is fully aware that Florida has over 80 percent attendance in its preschool program, which is in its BSA, base student allocation.

MR. GRIFFIN responded that yes, he does. He would be hard pressed to change anything in the approach that Florida has. He would acknowledge that its pre-K program probably does help them maintain that number one status in early childhood reading in the United States.

SENATOR BEGICH said in the 2019 report about the retention program in Florida, roughly 20 percent of third graders faced possible retention. In Florida, a third grader had to score level 2 or higher. Nearly 20 percent of third graders were at level 1. That would give some pause to think about one-fifth of students retained and the potential costs related to that.

MR. GRIFFIN replied that through the process, a large number of kids with reading deficiencies are identified early on, but the number retained is actually quite small. It is one thing that makes people sit up and pay attention to the policy. No one likes to see a nine-year-old repeat third grade. Any retention would include an intervention year that would be much different for the student from the year before. No one likes to see a 15-year-old who is illiterate who has been socially promoted. With reading the literature from Professor [Linda Darling-]Hammond from Stanford, he agrees retention is something to be avoided, but with a strong intervention, it is the key component. Evidence from states that have tried other paths shows it is the key component.

SENATOR BEGICH noted that the Florida reading law provides \$500 per student in that level 1 reading category, and asked what the impact of that extra money has been.

MR. GRIFFIN replied that it probably has a positive impact. He does not have the data in front of him. He would hesitate to vary from any policy that veers significantly from what has been successful in Florida and Mississippi. Without expending a lot of resources, they have produced amazing results. Miami-Dade kids have reading scores that are statistically indistinguishable from the upper-middle income white kids in Alaska.

SENATOR HUGHES said she assumes that the 20 percent in Florida includes students with disabilities and English language learners. That must be kept in mind. She thanked him for busting the myth regarding promotion, which is significant. She is a firm believer that with interventions, it will be rare, especially since it will take place after educators have been trained. She asked if Florida has a way to catch a child up to a cohort if the child is retained because that is the hope with the bill.

MR. GRIFFIN said his understanding is that Florida has a provision in statute to allow kids to rejoin their cohort if retained. He will follow up on actual retention stats for Florida. He is certain it is far below 20 percent. Although many kids faced the threat of retention, the number is far below 20 percent.

SENATOR BEGICH said that Mr. Griffin is right, that it doesn't mean that 20 percent was held back, but the 20 percent excludes those who qualified for an exemption because they are not required to test for the different levels. He would be interested to know the actual numbers retained.

10:01:32 AM

MARK LACKEY, Executive Director, CCS Early Learning, Wasilla, Alaska, said that CCS Early Learning is one of 17 Head Start grantees in the state. He is speaking on behalf of the Head Start Association, which includes all the grantees. He is excited to see Alaska considering additional pre-K. He is excited to see legislation around reading. Head Start has long thought that those two things are important for the state. Alaska has been behind the game in pre-K for many years. Head Start is excited to see this discussion happening and supportive. His testimony is about making sure that this is rolled out in a coordinated, collaborative way with no unintended consequences.

MR. LACKEY said the one issue his association has brought forward is how state funding can have a negative impact on federal funding. He provided two documents to the committee. One is a chart that shows all of the federal funding for Head Start. The chart shows that in federal FY20, \$57.9 million came to the 17 grantees to provide early childhood services across the state. That is base operational funding. The blue line from FY8 to FY20 shows that federal money has been on the uptick. A lot of federal money has been coming to the state to provide Head Start and Early Head Start services. That money goes directly to local grantees. The grantees write the federal grants. The grantees have been successful lately in pulling down one-time federal funding. In FY19, grantees brought in \$29 million of federal funding that largely went to build facilities. That is the size and scope of federal investment in pre-K.

MR. LACKEY said that the association has a concern connected to the other document he provided, Head Start Regulations. Federal government requires that Head Start is fully enrolled at all times. The first piece of statute that he provided is that if programs are chronically underenrolled, the Office of Head Start has the authority to withhold or withdraw funding. That has been an issue experienced in Alaska. The state has had \$2 million of preschool funding for many years. There have been instances of programs, especially in small communities with few eligible children, where districts would open up a pre-K program with state funding where a Head Start was already in existence and half the kids would be in pre-K and half would be in Head Start. Those programs become chronically underenrolled. The association is hopeful that as Alaska starts to consider increasing investment in pre-K that from the outset those sorts of conflict are avoided. Everyone wants more students served, not for less federal funding to come to the state or for there to be competition over children. The goal is for more children to be served and ready for school.

MR. LACKEY said the second regulation is that grantees demonstrate the need within the community as they write federal grants, so they are looking at existing childcare, existing state pre-K, not duplicating services or creating a situation of competition. The state of Alaska should consider that. Head Start cannot serve all children in the state of Alaska. Head Start's focus is on low income kids, kids in foster care, and kids who are homeless. The association is hopeful that the committee can consider some type of criteria about where the state funding goes.

10:08:42 AM

SENATOR HUGHES asked if a community wants preschool that meets the standards in the bill, if Head Start can meet the state requirements so a district would not need its own preschool. She also asked if Head Start has the flexibility to meet the higher pre-K standards of early literacy.

MR. LACKEY replied that every Head Start program is locally administered and governed by a board of parents and a board of directors. Head Start regulations give every grantee the flexibility to operate the program as those boards see fit. Head Start has mindboggling regulations and it must monitor every child for ongoing development on a variety of measures over time. Every single program is responsible to its local community and the federal government. The state Department of Education has that data on Head Start preschool programs. Head Start observes children over time; there is an ongoing assessment.

SENATOR HUGHES said the short answer is yes, every local program could choose to follow what will be prescribed by the state for pre-K, which might help ensure that they would not meet enrollment numbers if the district started another program.

MR. LACKEY responded that grantees can provide the program that the local community wants and expects, but the challenge is that if there is no requirement from the state to consider what is already being provided, if there is no stability of funding, those federal funds could be at risk. If districts put in an application and starts a pre-K program and if the districts are not in good communication or collaboration with Head Starts in their community, those federal funds could be at risk. Head Start is asking districts to look at services already in existence.

SENATOR HUGHES said she believes that local Head Start programs could approach districts and say they could be the preschool program and meet all the state requirements. She asked if he agrees.

MR. LACKEY said he was not sufficiently familiar with SB 111 to know whether she meant state or federal funding.

CHAIR HOLLAND advised that Mr. Lackey cannot answer that question from a legal standpoint.

SENATOR BEGICH asked if he had reviewed page 17 of the bill that defines the qualities that Senator Hughes was referring to



because it is certainly not childcare. In SB 8 and SB 42, there were provisions requiring coordination. He said he believes it is in this bill but he cannot remember where it is. It is a simple paragraph requiring local coordination before starting a program. If it is not in SB 111, he said he is sure the committee will want to add it. He said Mr. Lackey's concern is one that has been brought up repeatedly when early education bills have been brought up. The committee's concern is ensuring that quality early education meets those really good standards as Senator Hughes has been clear at pointing out. The question she was asking was if Head Start would be able to bring programs to the standards of the bill.

CHAIR HOLLAND said he thought that Mr. Lackey is concerned about making a legal commitment about being able to participate in this program. He asked Mr. Lackey to respond.

MR. LACKEY said that on page 17 he sees evidence-based programs that meets federal standards for early education programs. He is curious about what the federal standards are for early education. He said he suspects those would be the federal regulations for Head Start. That is his suspicion, but he doesn't know that. He is confident in the quality of Head Start programs and those programs would meet or exceed the quality levels being proposed in SB 111.

SENATOR BEGICH said he appreciates that answer. It reinforces that they are not talking about competition over resources. They are talking about improving education for kids. It is about reaching that standard.

CHAIR HOLLAND asked how many programs are run by the 17 grantees.

MR. LACKEY answered that the 17 grantees are located in over 100 communities across the state. He can provide the list of grantees and list of communities. For example, Kawerak is in 11 communities throughout the Nome region. Rural CAP fills in the gaps all over the state in 24 communities. His grantee serves Wasilla, Palmer, Meadow Lakes, Chugiak, and Eagle River.

CHAIR HOLLAND asked how many children are in the programs.

MR. LACKEY replied about 4,000 cumulative a year, although COVID is not a normal year.

CHAIR HOLLAND asked what ages. He assumed birth through age five.

MR LACKEY said that is correct and the numbers can be broken out.

CHAIR HOLLAND said that he wanted to make it clear that it was not 17 programs and that there are 4,000 children. It is federal funds that are important in Alaska.

CHAIR HOLLAND asked his staff to continue the sectional analysis starting with AS 14.30.765(g) of Section 33.

[10:19:44 AM](#)

ED KING, Staff, Senator Roger Holland, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, suggested that it might be appropriate to just finish reading the sectional and save the conversation for a later date.

CHAIR HOLLAND said there would probably be another sectional analysis for a committee substitute that will show up in the future.

SENATOR BEGICH agreed with the approach but asked for more details about page 30, AS 14.30.770, the issue of the five participating schools each year. He would like more description about what that process would look like.

MR. KING said that was coming up in the sectional analysis and he could either expand directly on that or come back to it at the end if there is time.

CHAIR HOLLAND said the committee could revisit that after the sectional analysis.

[10:21:07 AM](#)

MR. KING continued the sectional for SB 111, beginning with AS 14.30.765(g) of Section 33:

Sec. 33 7/1/21 [Effective date] This section adds several new sections of law related to reading intervention:

- AS 14.30.760 directs DEED to establish a statewide reading assessment and screening tool to identify students with reading deficiencies and establishes a timeline in which assessments are conducted.

- AS 14.30.765(a) directs each school district to offer intensive reading intervention services to K-3 students exhibiting a reading deficiency and communicate with parents and guardians.
- AS 14.30.765(b) directs school districts to provide individual reading improvement plans for K-3 students exhibiting a reading deficiency and defines the plan's components.
- AS 14.30.765(c) requires districts to notify a student's parents that their child has demonstrated a reading deficiency along with corresponding information about remedying the deficiency.
- AS 14.30.765(d) outlines a procedure for communicating which a child's parents about the potential need to delay promotion to fourth grade.
- AS 14.30.765(e) sets out the factors which determine if a child is ready for promotion to the fourth grade.
- AS 14.30.765(f) establishes a parental waiver to allow a student to advance to fourth grade without reading at grade level and requires an additional 20 hours of summer intervention services.
- AS 14.30.765(g) directs the department to develop a recognition program for improving reading skills.
- AS 14.30.765(h) establishes good cause exemptions for delaying promotion.
- AS 14.30.765(h) outlines the process for requesting a good cause exemption (disability, prior intervention, and ESL).
- AS 14.30.765(i) sets forth the process for requesting a good cause exemption.
- AS 14.30.765(j) requires that a child's parents receive written notification that their child did not demonstrate sufficient reading proficiency for promotion to fourth grade.
- AS 14.30.765(k) directs the district to provide additional intervention for students that do not promote or promote with a good cause or parental waiver.
- AS 14.30.765(l) establishes a policy for mid-year promotion.
- AS 14.30.765(m) requires that a student promoting mid-year continue the individual reading improvement plan.
- AS 14.30.765(n) limits retention to one year.
- AS 14.30.765(o) provide a definition for reading teacher.

- AS 14.30.770 directs the department to establish a statewide reading program, including five reading specialists to assist selected schools.
- AS 14.30.775 provides definitions.

MR. KING said (h) has not been discussed but he hopes it will be a conversation for a later date. He has a note for the potential amendment for (j).

Sec. 34 7/1/26 [Effective date] Is a future amendment to AS 14.30.765(c), related to fourth grade promotion previously added under section 33, which changes the delayed promotion from a "should" to a "must," which takes effect on July 1, 2026 (see section 44).

Sec. 35 7/1/26 [Effective date] Is a future amendment to AS 14.30.765(e), related to fourth grade promotion previously added under section 33, which changes the delayed promotion from a "should" to a "must," which takes effect on July 1, 2026 (see section 44).

Sec. 36 7/1/21 [Effective date] Adds a new section of law, AS 14.30.800, which establishes a virtual education consortium. This consortium allows districts to offer virtual access to student courses and professional development courses through a statewide system hosted by the department of education. This section also creates a reading specialist position to remotely assist districts to improve reading instruction.

Sec. 37 7/1/21 [Effective date] Adds "early education program" to the definition of "organization" in AS 47.17.290, which pertains to the Department of Health and Social Services.

Sec. 38 6/30/32 [Effective date] Repeals the following:

- AS 14.03.410 (early education funding added in section 10 of this bill).
- AS 14.03.420 (Parents-as-Teachers program added in section 10 of this bill)
- AS 14.07.165(a)(5) (regulations establishing standards for early education programs added by section 17 of this bill).
- AS 14.17.905(d) (prohibition on including early education students with other state or federal funding, added by section 29 of this bill).

MR. KING said AS 14.07.165(a)(5) may be something the committee does not want repealed.

10:24:27 AM

Sec. 39 6/30/28 [Effective date] Repeals AS 14.30.770 (reading intervention specialists added under section 33 of this bill).

Sec. 40 7/1/21 [Effective date] Sets a deadline for the department of education to complete the set-up of the virtual education consortium by July 1, 2023.

Sec. 41 7/1/21 [Effective date] Applicability language related to the reading instruction requirement added by section 32 of this bill, which allows teachers with preexisting teaching certificates until July 1, 2023 to meet the new requirements.

MR. KING said he made a note of the discussion about including all programs in the report in Section 42.

Sec. 42 7/1/21 [Effective date] Requires a report from DEED to the legislature on the effectiveness of the reading specialists added in section 33 not later than January 1, 2028, which allows the legislature to consider extending the positions before they sunset on June 30, 2028.

MR. KING said that Section 43 directs DEED to use 2019-2020 as the base year because of COVID complications.

Sec. 43 7/1/21 [Effective date] Directs DEED to use the 2019-2020 school year as the base year for the FY22 Early education grants.

Sec. 44 Provides an effective date of July 1, 2026 for sections 7, 24, 25, 26, 34, and 35.

Sec. 45 Provides an effective date of June 30, 2028 for sections 12, 16, and 39.

Sec. 46 Provides an effective date of June 30, 2032 for sections 3, 13, 22, 28, and 38. Sec. 47 Provides an effective date of July 1, 2021 for all other sections.

MR. KING said he provided a handout with a graphic representation of the sunset provisions.

SENATOR BEGICH referenced on page 30, the section of new law that would be AS 14.30.770, department reading program, which is eventually repealed. He noted that the way it is written now, school districts with low-performing schools would compete again each year for the grant program. There is no surety. He opined that is perhaps a flaw with the process. There could be a single competitive period of time, so a program can have a few years to have effect. Otherwise, it is a race to the bottom. He asked the chair to take a second look at how the program is conducted under that section to ensure that it doesn't end just being the poorest-performing districts fighting it out with each other over which one will eventually get the money each given year. It is a single-year grant as opposed to the other versions of this bill, which said school districts would compete for the money and then have a certain number of years to get the program up and running with the necessary support. This time-limited approach is wrong and bound to fail. That is what reports and data will show.

SENATOR HUGHES said Section 44 is the strong promotion policy, Section 45 is the repeal date for the reading specialists, and Section 46 is about pre-K.

MR. KING replied that sounds correct.

SENATOR HUGHES referred to page 28, lines 3-5, of the bill. She recalled working on this in previous versions of the bill. This is the interim period before the strong promotion policy kicks in. It recognizes the teachers, schools, and districts that are increasing the percentage of students proficient in reading. She asked if that has a repeal date when the strong promotion policy kicks in or does it stay on forever.

MR. KING responded that there is no repeal of that provision.

SENATOR HUGHES said she is fine with that, but when it was developed it was to encourage schools to get programs up and running in those first four years.

MR. KING said to address Senator Begich's point, DEED would employ five reading specialists and deploy them to schools that win the grants. It is not a financial grant, it is a person who goes to a school to teach the teachers how to teach reading. It is a teach-the-teacher type of program. The idea is that those are not permanent employees of the schools whose applications are accepted. These are temporary employees who teach the

teachers how to teach and, hopefully, be successful and move on to other schools.

SENATOR BEGICH said that he wrote this provision of the bill with the exception of "may apply to participate in the reading program again in the following school year," lines 24 and 25. That means that these folks are being asked to compete for that resource. They will apply to DEED each year and he is suggesting a longer term

than a year.

[10:33:45 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND held SB 111 in committee.

[10:34:11 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Holland adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 10:34 a.m.